

The Sensational **SPIDER-MAN**

BACK IN BLACK



My first year of journalism school, J. Jonah Jameson came to lecture us newbies. Among other things, he said (and I quote):

EVERY STORY CAN BE BOILED DOWN TO THIS ESSENCE:

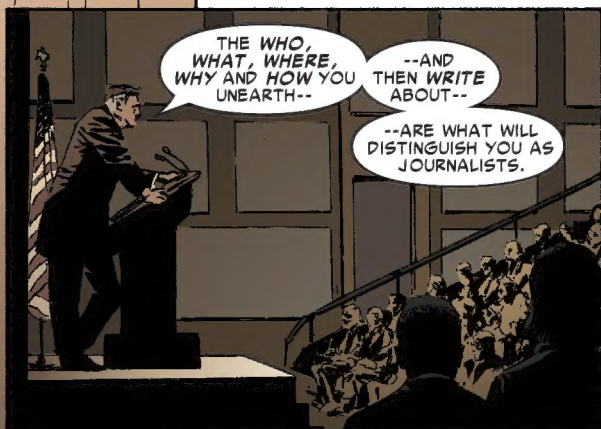
A MAN IS BORN...HE LIVES...HE DIES.



BUT THE DETAILS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN...



...WHAT HAPPENS IN BETWEEN THOSE THREE IMMUTABLE EVENTS...



THE WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY AND HOW YOU UNEARTH--

--AND THEN WRITE ABOUT--

--ARE WHAT WILL DISTINGUISH YOU AS JOURNALISTS.



I was twenty-two years old back then.

Virile. Healthy.

Interning at
the *Daily Globe*.



I was
happy.

But that
was before...

Well, like the
dealer says, "Pick a
card, any card..."

The Sin-Eater
scandal that
WRECKED my
career.

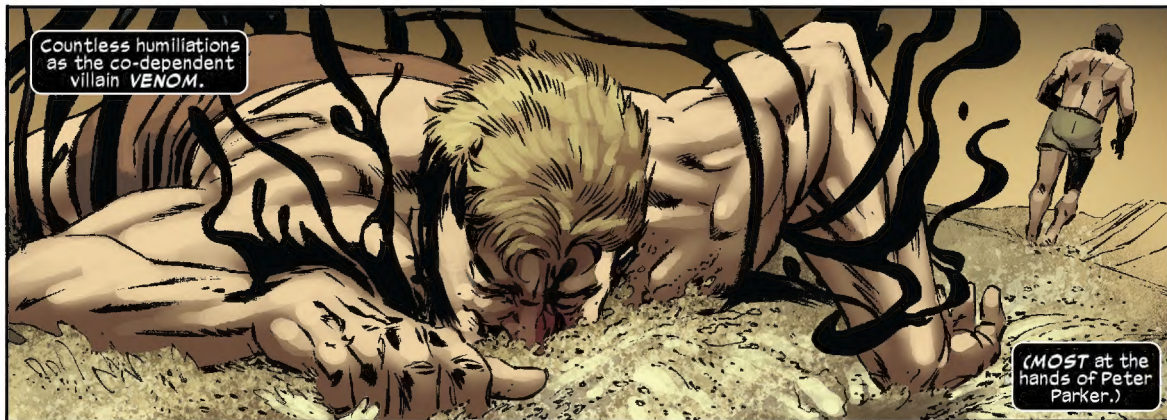


(Because
of Parker.)

Then the suicide attempt
that was interrupted by
an alien symbiote looking
for a host.

(Parker's
fault. Again.)





Countless humiliations
as the co-dependent
villain **VENOM**.

(MOST at the
hands of Peter
Parker.)



My death
sentence.

THE CURIOUS
THING IS, MR. BROCK...
WITH CANCER AT THIS
ADVANCED STAGE...

YOU SHOULD
BE DEAD, BUT IT'S
AS THOUGH SOMETHING
WERE KEEPING YOU
ALIVE.

(Haven't figured
out how Parker's
responsible for THAT
yet, but I will...)



My "conversion"
and decision to
sell the symbiote
to the highest
bidder...

...even a
fellow villain...

...so I'd be able to
donate the money
to charity before
the cancer finished
consuming me.

WE'LL
START AT...OH,
TEN MILLION
DOLLARS?



A second (more successful) suicide
attempt when I learned that my
good intentions were all for naught
since the "new" Venom was killing
innocents indiscriminately.



A man is
born...he lives...
he dies...



In *MY* case...alone,
shriveled, in pain.

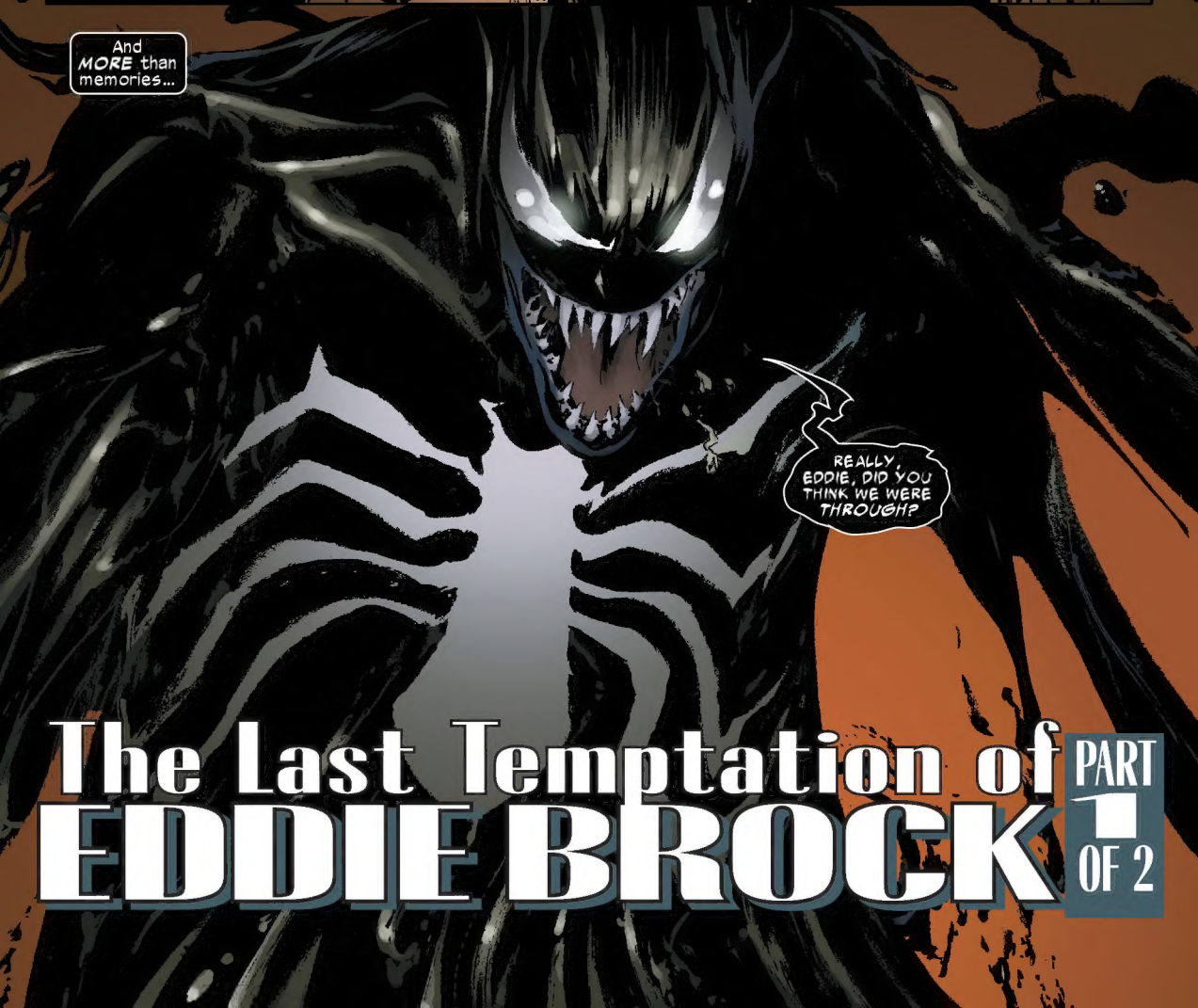
My days spent shuffling
along the hallways of this
hospital like a member of
the living dead...



My nights spent *NOT*
sleeping in my room on
the *TERMINAL WARD*...

Haunted by
memories...

And
MORE than
memories...



REALLY,
EDDIE, DID YOU
THINK WE WERE
THROUGH?

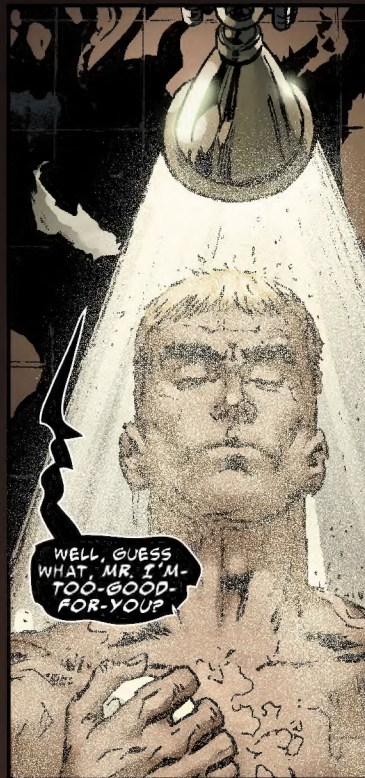
The Last Temptation of **EDDIE BROCK**

PART
OF 2



DID YOU THINK YOU'D BE ABLE TO GET RID OF ME THAT EASILY?

SORRY WE KEEP HAVING TO DRAW BLOOD, EDDIE...



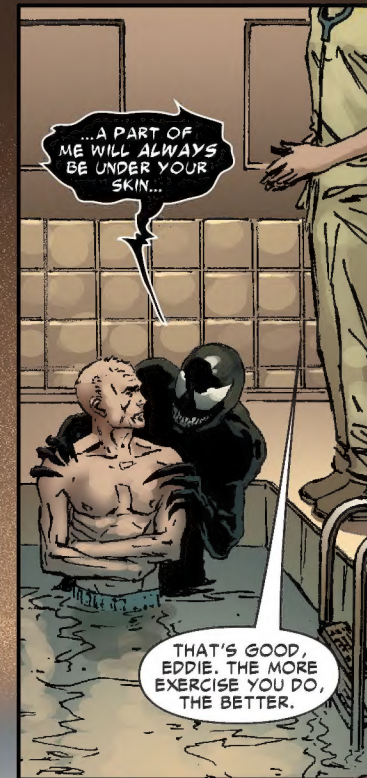
WELL, GUESS WHAT, MR. I'M TOO-GOOD-FOR-YOU!



YOU MAY HAVE SOLD ME LIKE CATTLE...



BUT I'M UNDER YOUR SKIN, EDDIE BROCK...



...A PART OF ME WILL ALWAYS BE UNDER YOUR SKIN...

THAT'S GOOD, EDDIE. THE MORE EXERCISE YOU DO, THE BETTER.



SO NOW I'M JUST WAITING FOR YOU TO DIE.



AND FOR THE DOCTORS TO PERFORM AN AUTOPSY AND SLICE YOU OPEN.



AND SET ME FREE.

SOON ENOUGH, CHUMP.

SOON-- ENOUGH!

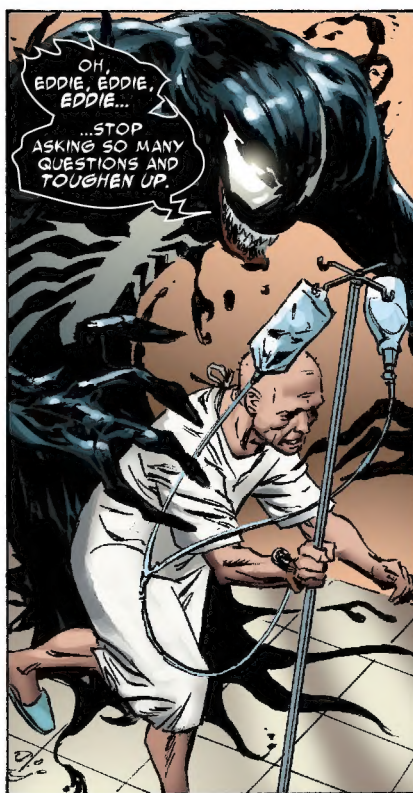


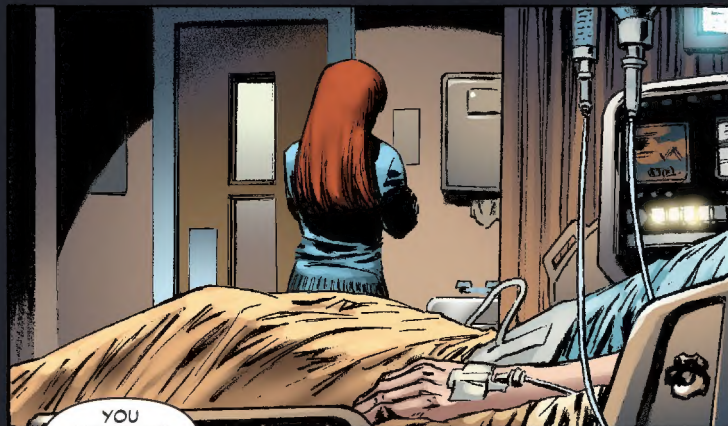
But I've held on, haven't I?

And I started wondering WHY.

Was I a part of something LARGER? A GREATER design?







YOU LISTEN TO ME. YOU LISTEN TO ME RIGHT NOW.

MAY PARKER...



THAT BULLET...

THAT SNIPER'S BULLET WAS MEANT FOR ME.



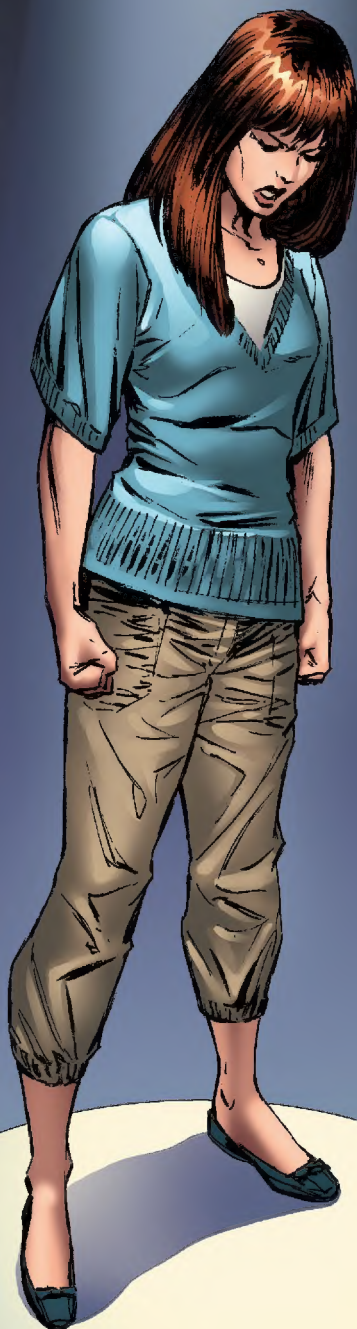
"PETER DOVE...AND PUSHED ME OUT OF THE LINE OF FIRE..."

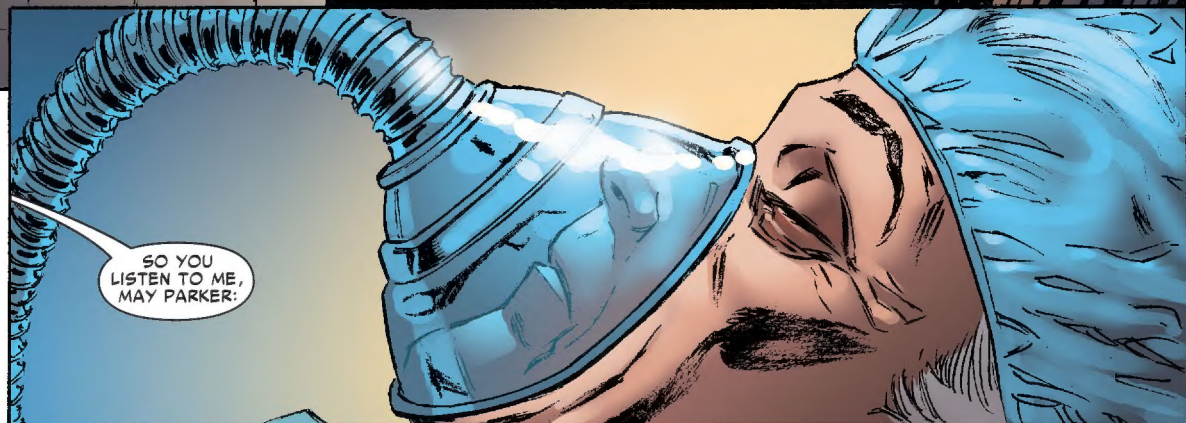


"AND THE BULLET HIT YOU..."

I'M YOUNGER THAN YOU, MAY. MY BODY'S STRONGER. IF THAT BULLET HAD HIT ME...

I WOULD'VE BEEN HURT, BUT MAYBE NOT AS BAD AS YOU...







"FOR MY
SAKE."

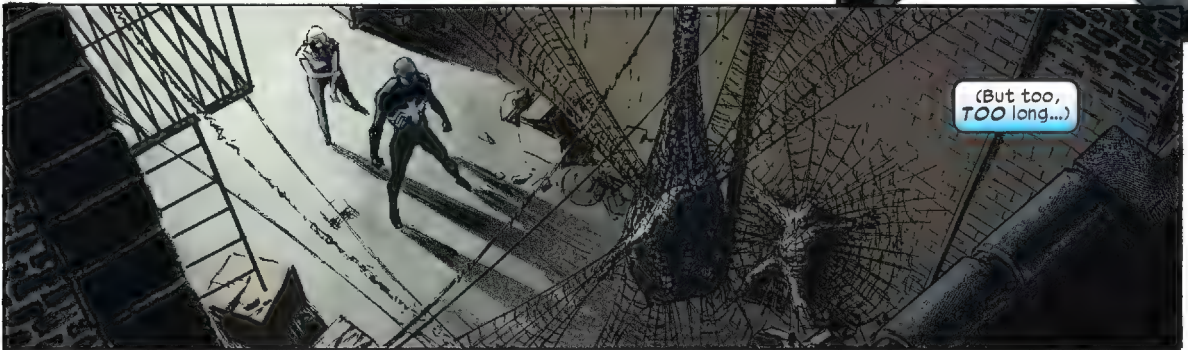
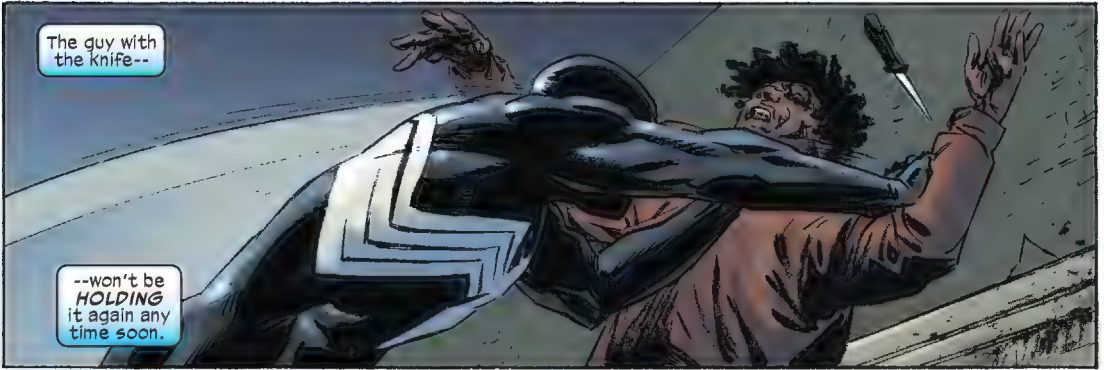
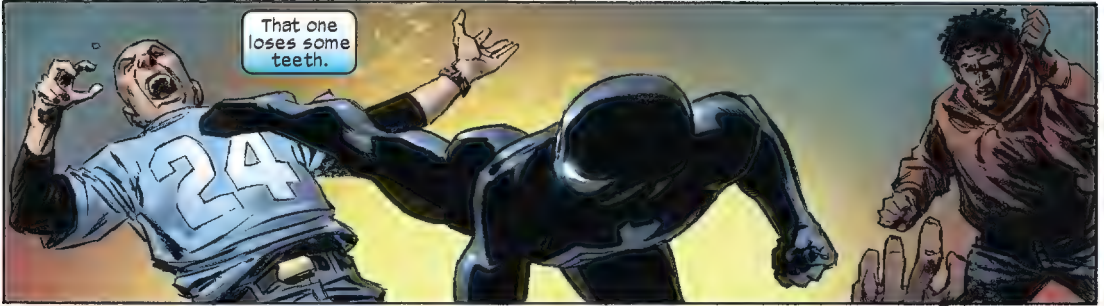
"FOR YOUR
NEPHEW'S
SAKE."

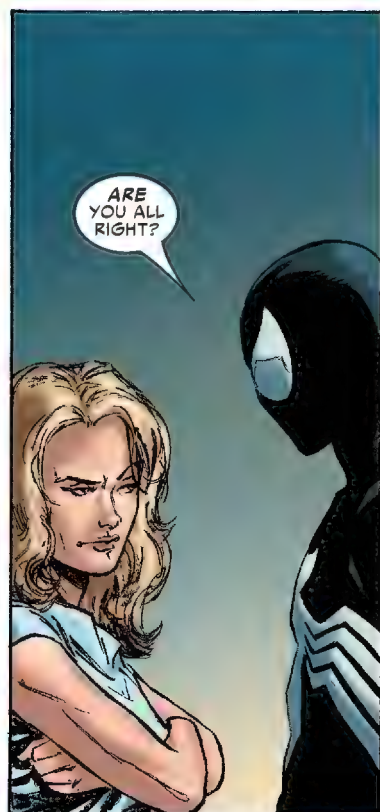
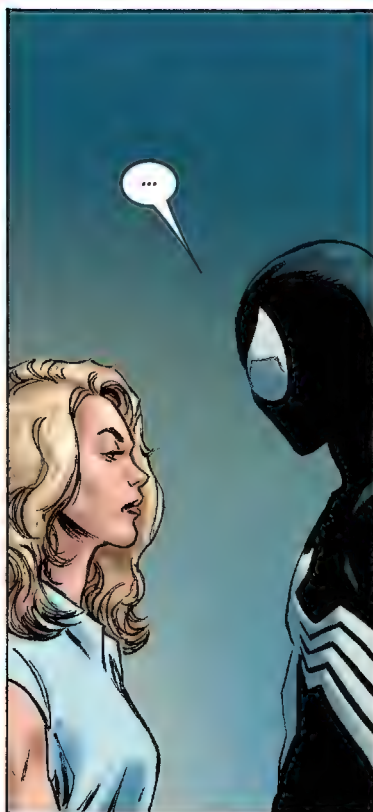
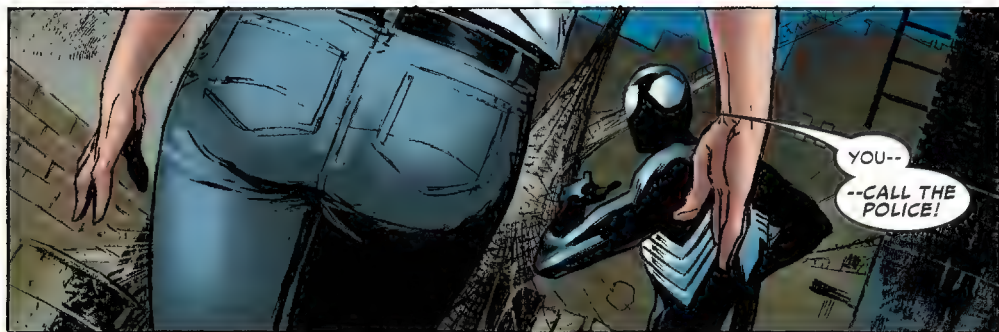
"FOR THE
WORLD'S
SAKE."

"COME
BACK
TO US."



NORMALLY,
I'D BE TALKING A
MILE A MINUTE, BUT
YOU CREEPS CAUGHT
ME AT THE END OF
A VERY LONG
WEEK.





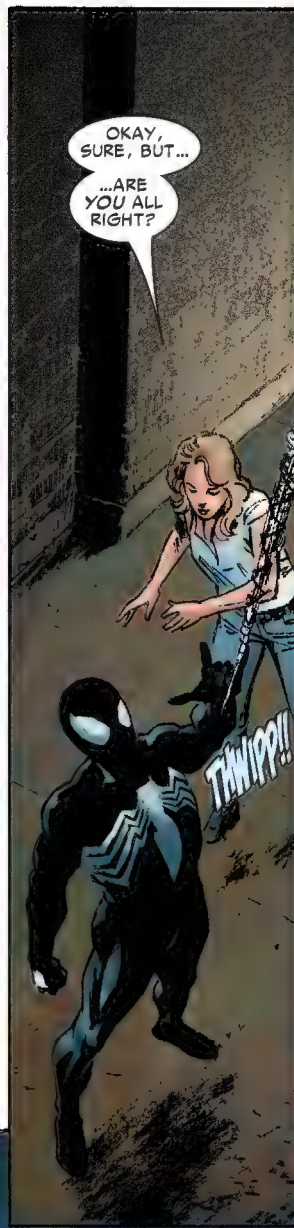


WELL...
YES.
THANKS
TO YOU.



(Thank *GOD*,
because I can't
waste any more
TIME.)

LOOK...
AROUND
THE CORNER,
THERE'S A 24-HOUR
DINER. YOU CAN CALL
THE POLICE AND WAIT
FOR THEM THERE.
YOU'LL BE *SAFE*.




OKAY,
SURE, BUT...
...ARE
YOU ALL
RIGHT?



I'M ASKING
BECAUSE YOU
SEEM--
--HEY,
WAIT--



"--WHERE ARE
YOU GOING?"

A wide shot of Spider-Man in his black and white suit, hanging from several chains that are attached to the windows of a multi-story brick building. The scene is set at night, with some interior lights visible through the windows.

An apartment building
on 43rd Street and
11th Avenue, with a great
view of the Hudson.

(Wasted, by the
way, on the occupant
of apartment 30-D.)

I'm wondering if
I'm going to have
to **BREAK** a
window to get in...

...but **NO**, she
left one open for me,
just like last time.

One of the
advantages, I
guess, of being
clairvoyant.

(No such thing as
an unexpected
guest dropping in.)

HELLO...?
MADAME
WEB...?

WHEN I
WAS YOUNG AND
BEAUTIFUL, I HAD
GENTLEMEN CALLERS
EVERY NIGHT,
WOONING ME WITH
CHOCOLATES AND
FLOWERS...

...DITES-MOI,
SPIDER-MAN:

WHAT TOKENS
HAVE YOU BROUGHT
ME THIS EVENING?

NONE, I'M
AFRAID, MADAME
WEB.

I...I CAME
TO ASK FOR
YOUR HELP.

BIEN SÛR;
THE ONLY VISITORS
I RECEIVE NOWADAYS
ARE PEOPLE WHO WANT
TO SELL ME SOMETHING
OR PEOPLE LOOKING
FOR ADVICE.

COME INTO
MY PARLOR; I'VE
ALREADY POURED
YOU A CUP OF
TEA.

ACTUALLY,
MADAME WEB--

--YOU'RE
STRUNG OUT ON BAD
HOSPITAL COFFEE AND
WOULD RATHER NOT
IMBIBE ANY MORE
CAFFEINE.

NEVER
FEAR, SPIDER-MAN,
THIS IS CALMING,
HERBAL TEA.

SIT.
TELL ME
WHAT YOU
NEED...



Over a cup of Quietly Chamomile
I bring Madame Web up to speed.
I tell her about the sniper and how
revealing my secret identity made
us all targets and how my Aunt May's
just barely hanging on, in a coma...



And as I'm talking,
Madame Web just sits
there, smiling that cold,
CREEPY smile of hers,
not saying anything...

(Since she's psychic and
has ESP, I wonder how much
of this is new information and
how much she already knew...)



Finally, I
circle around
to "the ask":

...THAT'S WHY
I WANT YOU TO
PERFORM...

...I GUESS
YOU'D CALL IT
A SEANCE.



OH? MAIS
YOUR AUNT ISN'T
DEAD YET, SPIDER-
MAN...

WHAT GOOD
WILL A SEANCE
DO?



WE HAVE TO
REACH HER SOMEHOW,
MADAME WEB. SHE HAS TO
KNOW THAT WE'RE HERE,
WAITING FOR HER
TO WAKE UP...

WITH YOU...
I DON'T KNOW,
CHANNELING, MAYBE
WE CAN ESTABLISH
CONTACT...**THROW HER**
A LIFELINE...



WHAT
YOU'RE ASKING
ME TO DO...

SUCH
A THING *IS*
POSSIBLE...

DEPENDING
ON...



TELL
ME--
ANYTHING--



NO, NO,
SPIDER-MAN,
NOTHING TO DO
WITH YOU...

IT ALL
DEPENDS ON
WHERE YOUR
AUNT *IS*...

AND WHETHER
OR NOT SHE WANTS
TO BE REACHED...



BUT...
...YOU'LL
TRY, AT
LEAST?



I WILL.
I'D DECIDED THAT
BEFORE YOU CRAWLED
IN THROUGH MY WINDOW,
SPIDER-MAN.

I HAVE A
SUITCASE WITH
THE NECESSARY...
ACCOUNTREMENTS
PACKED AND
READY TO GO.



"A man is born...
he lives...he dies..."

But **BEFORE**
he dies...

...before
I die...

...I PRAY.

For
guidance.

And
understanding.

And
MEANING.



Whatever
else I/we did
as Venom...

...no matter
WHO I/we fought
or killed...

...I/we vowed to
PRESERVE the lives
of the **INNOCENT**...



...DIDN'T
WE?

YES,
EDDIE, WE DID,
WE DID...



THEN HOW--
HOW--DO I
MAKE SENSE
OF THIS?

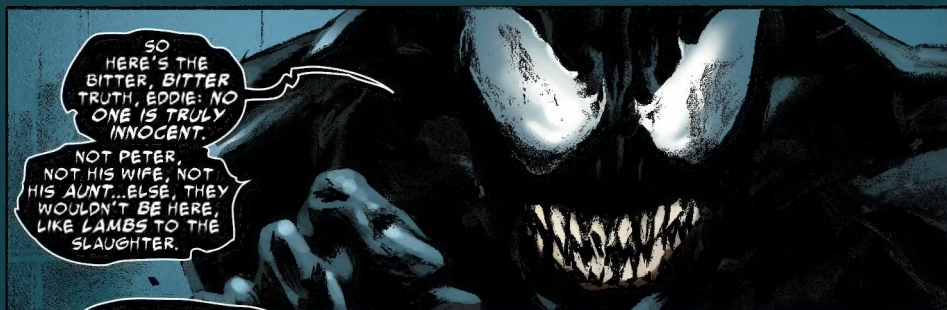
THAT MY
GREATEST ENEMY'S
FAMILY IS **HERE**?
HELPLESS AND
UNPROTECTED?

WHAT
CAN THAT
MEAN?



THAT IT'S
LIFE-AND-DEATH
TIME, EDDIE...

MOMENT-
OF-TRUTH
TIME...



SO
HERE'S THE
BITTER, BITTER
TRUTH, EDDIE: NO
ONE IS TRULY
INNOCENT.

NOT PETER,
NOT HIS WIFE, NOT
HIS AUNT...ELSE, THEY
WOULDN'T BE HERE,
LIKE LAMBS TO THE
SLAUGHTER.



AND, ULTIMATELY...
A PERSON'S GUILT OR
INNOCENCE ISN'T FOR
US TO DECIDE.



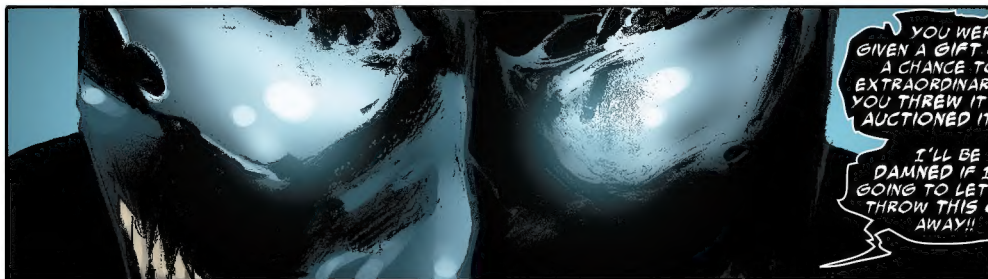
DO THE
HARVESTING, EDDIE,
THEN LET SOMEONE
ELSE SORT THE GOOD
FROM THE BAD.

BUT...

BUT...

NO "BUTS"
EDDIE! YOU'VE BEEN
HANDLED AN OPPORTUNITY
HERE. TO MAKE YOUR LITTLE,
PALTRY LIFE COUNT FOR
SOMETHING. I'M NOT
GOING TO LET YOU WASTE
THAT BECAUSE YOU DON'T
HAVE THE NECESSARY
GUTS!





YOU WERE GIVEN A GIFT ONCE-- A CHANCE TO BE EXTRAORDINARY--AND YOU THREW IT AWAY!!! AUCTIONED IT OFF!!!

I'LL BE DAMNED IF I'M GOING TO LET YOU THROW THIS ONE AWAY!!!

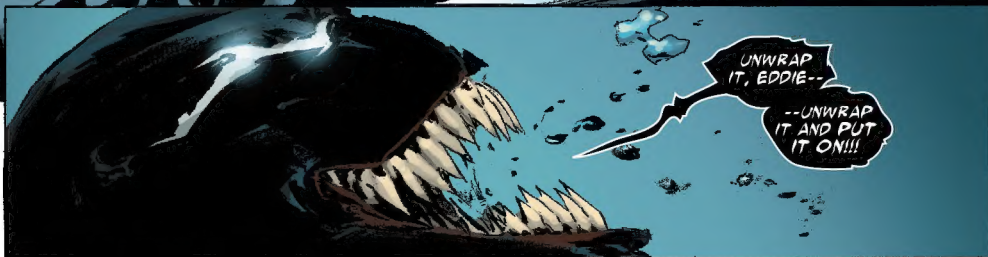


SO STOP PRETENDING YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT AND UNWRAP THAT THING I OVERHEARD YOU ORDERING--



TH-THERE WAS AN ARTICLE IN THE PAPER, NOW THAT HE'S WEARING B-BLACK AGAIN... THEY'RE ALL O-OVER THE CITY...

(God help me, but my dark half is **RIGHT**. There's only **ONE** reason I had Ricky's Variety make a special delivery to the hospital...)



UNWRAP IT, EDDIE--

--UNWRAP IT AND PUT IT ON!!!



I do as I'm told.

Fingers trembling, I unwrap the package.

Legs almost buckling beneath me, I slip the costume on.

